

USE OF TOBACCO IN MEXICO AND SOUTH AMERICA

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ANTHROPOLOGY

LEAFLET 16

FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
CHICAGO
1924

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FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
CHICAGO, U. S. A.

FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

CHICAGO, 1924

LEAFLET

NUMBER 16

Use of Tobacco in Mexico and South America

At the time of the discovery of America, tobacco was cultivated by the American natives in practically every region to which it was naturally suited, and, due to its ease of preservation and trade, its use extended even beyond the boundaries of agriculture and pottery in America. The principal species, however, *Nicotiana tabacum*, was unknown in pre-Columbian times north of Mexico, the Indians of the United States employing other varieties, and it is with this species exclusively, therefore, that the present essay is concerned.

While the use of tobacco was, in aboriginal times, wide-spread over practically all of America, the methods of its use varied greatly in different sections. Certain of these methods seem to be more primitive than others, but whether a definite evolutionary scheme may be postulated is, to say the least, doubtful. It is quite certain, for instance, that the cultivation of tobacco, as practised by almost all tribes, is a later development from the gathering of wild tobacco which must have been the primitive custom. It is a tempting evolutionary scheme to suggest that the earliest method of tobacco use was in the form of a cigar,—crushed tobacco leaves rolled in a large tobacco leaf. The next step was to the cigarette, in which the tobacco was rolled in a better wrapper, of corn-husk or bark cloth. This led naturally to the tubular pipe, at first

made of a hollow reed and then of pottery or stone. From this, finally, by a turn in the bowl which permitted the pipe to be held more horizontally, evolved the modern "elbow" pipe. Nevertheless, while this is a rational scheme, it must be admitted that there is no evidence that it is an historical one, except possibly in some instances of the last two steps where tubular pipes are found among some groups in ceremonial religious use, while the ordinary pipes are of the "elbow" type, thus illustrating the usual conservative tendencies of religious observance.

Similarly, it is quite probable that the earliest use of tobacco was in religious ceremonies, and that its use as a pastime was a more recent development. Plants with intoxicating and narcotic properties have always been looked upon by primitive peoples as endowed with supernatural powers on account of their ability to put the taker in an abnormal condition, during which he may behold visions and receive supernatural impressions, and consequently tobacco, in almost every Indian group, played a most important part in religious and esoteric ceremonies. But, whether used in religious observances or as a personal pastime, tobacco was apparently employed in pre-Columbian America as to-day, mainly by men.

Tobacco was also used for chewing, snuffing and several forms of licking or drinking by the aborigines of certain portions of America; these practises, however, as will be seen, were due to the influence of other plant customs and were not typical of tobacco usages.

Not only have these various methods and customs of taking tobacco persisted until to-day among the native tribes, but they have also been largely adopted by the modern civilized populations of these same regions and, interesting to state, have influenced in diverse ways the tobacco habits of the various parts of Europe.



MEXICAN POTTERY PIPES WITH INCISED DECORATIONS REPRESENTING BIRDS'-HEADS.

In the West Indies tobacco was employed in the form of a cigar—dried leaves rolled in a larger leaf. This custom also obtained through most of north-central South America. The native peoples of the Antilles are now extinct, although the cigar still remains the favorite smoke in that region, but in South America many tribes exist in their original state of culture who take their tobacco in the form of cigars.

The first European contact with tobacco was, apparently, when Columbus with his little caravels, after making his first landfall on the small island of San Salvador or Watling's Island, steered again toward the southwest, meeting at sea an Indian canoe loaded, among other things, with dried leaves. The use of tobacco was, however, first observed by two messengers whom Columbus sent ashore in Cuba, or, according to other authorities, in Hispaniola (Santo Domingo). One of these men was a learned Jew who could speak Chaldean, Hebrew and Arabic and who, Columbus felt sure, would therefore be able to speak with any deputy official of the Grand Khan of Cathay (China) whom he might encounter. They met many men carrying firebrands and packages of dried herbs rolled up in a dried leaf. Lighting one end of this, they sucked the smoke out of the other end, giving the information that it comforted the limbs, intoxicated them, made them sleepy, and lessened their weariness, and that the objects were called *tabacos*.

Thus was the cigar first discovered in what still remains its principal stronghold, Cuba. It is of interest to note that the aboriginal name, *tabaco*, apparently meant not *tobacco* as such, but *cigar*, and that at present, in this Antillean region, a cigar is still called "un tabaco." Our word is, of course, derived from the aboriginal form *tabaco*, which is the modern Spanish form. This word is in nearly uniform use to-day, but

in earlier years the Brazilian term *petun* and the Aztec name *picietl* were also in use.

The aboriginal inhabitants of the Antilles, however, were practically exterminated within a half century after the discovery, so that the only information with regard to the native processes of cultivating, curing, and using tobacco must be derived from historical records of the time of the conquest. No pipes were used in the West Indies, so that none of the paraphernalia of smoking in this region has survived.

Here, as almost universally in America, tobacco was employed by native "medicine-men," in their quasi-magical ceremonies for the cure of the sick. Benzoni, one of the earliest chroniclers, writes, "In La España and other islands when their doctors wanted to cure a sick man, they went to the place where they were to administer the smoke, and when the patient was thoroughly intoxicated by it the cure was mostly effected."

In the north-central South American region, the use of the cigar, and in some places the cigarette, varies greatly in detail from tribe to tribe. Apparently, most of these tribes smoke tobacco as a solace and pastime, as is the modern custom, tobacco playing but a small part in the religious ceremonials and esoteric observances. Patches of tobacco are planted and grown, generally by the women, though among some tribes even the cultivation of tobacco is taboo to women. The leaves are then dried and preserved, to be used as required in the manufacture of cigars or cigarettes, the latter being frequently made with a wrapper of vegetable fiber or a sort of cloth beaten out from bark. In Guiana the tobacco is sometimes dipped in honey.

In certain regions, peculiar customs of smoking prevail. Thus Lionel Wafer reports the practise of a certain Panama tribe in 1680 as follows: "The dried



tobacco leaves are stripped from the stalk, and laying two or three leaves one upon another they roll all up sideways into a long roll, yet leaving a little hollow; round this they roll other leaves one after another in the same manner, but close and hard, till the roll is as big as one's wrist and two or three feet in length. Their way of smoking when they are in company together is thus: A boy lights one end of a roll and burns it to a coal, wetting the part next to it to keep it from wasting too fast; the end so lighted, he puts into his mouth, and blows the smoke through the whole length of the roll into the face of everyone of the company or council, though there be two or three hundred of them. Then they, sitting in their usual posture upon forms, make with their hands held together a kind of funnel around their mouths and noses; into this they receive the smoke as it is blown upon them, snuffing it up greedily and strongly, as long as ever they are able to hold their breath, and seeming to bless themselves as it were with the refreshment it gives them."

Mexico and Central America and some parts of northern South America were the regions in which the cigarette was the favored form of smoking tobacco, crushed tobacco leaves being rolled in a wrapper of corn-husk or bark cloth. The corn-husk cigarette is at present the popular smoke of millions of Mexican Indians, and the cigarette, in fact as well as in popular belief, is the hall-mark of the Mexican. Few cigars or pipes are smoked in Mexico to-day.

Benzoni thus refers to the preparation and use of tobacco among these natives: "When the leaves are in season, they pick them, tie them up in bundles and suspend them near the fireplace until they are very dry, and when they wish to use them, they take a leaf of their grain, and putting one of the others into it, they roll them round tight together; then they set fire

to one end and, putting the other into the mouth, they draw their breath up through it, and they retain it as long as they can, and so much do they fill themselves with this cruel smoke that they lose their reason; and some there are who take so much of it that they fall down as if they were dead and remain the greater part of the day or night stupefied."

The regions in which the cigar and cigarette were the customary forms of taking tobacco were settled almost exclusively by the Spanish who, naturally, adopted the customs of the natives so that at present these are the favorite methods of Spanish-speaking countries, among whom the pipe finds little favor. In the same way, it has only been within the past few decades, and after considerable conservative opposition, that the cigarette has secured the stamp of approval in northern countries.

A transition form between the cigarette and the pipe was employed in aboriginal America by the Indians of Mexico and the Rocky Mountain states of this country. This was the reed cigarette which consisted of crushed tobacco leaves crammed into a hollow section of cane or reed. Many examples of these have been found in excavations in the arid regions of Arizona and New Mexico, but in most localities the reeds have perished utterly, and the custom has gone out of use.

A further development is found in the tubular pipes which were in common use in the same general region. These were of pottery or stone and were, of course, much more permanent than the reed sections. Among most tribes these were coarse and crude, but apparently the Aztec nobles of Montezuma's time employed delicate ornate tubes of expensive materials which may be compared to the cigarette-holders of the present time. None of these fine ornate pipes escaped the cupidity of the invaders and survived, it being



necessary to derive our knowledge of them and their use from the accounts left by the historians of that period. However, some of the ancient hieroglyphs carved on monuments or drawn on the maguey-paper books known as codices depict men, probably priests, in the act of using these tubular pipes, though the point as to whether the smokers were inhaling the fumes or blowing them out in a religious fumigation ceremony has occasioned some argument.

According to the accounts of eye-witnesses, the Aztec dignitaries of the court of Montezuma were accustomed to smoke after dinner before the siesta, to which they were as devoted as the Spaniard himself. The tobacco was generally mixed with other aromatic substances, principally liquidambar (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), and smoked in tubes or pipes, which were richly painted and gilded, and frequently made of tortoise-shell or silver. They compressed the nostrils with the fingers and inhaled the smoke, frequently, it is reported, swallowing it. However, it must be remembered that the custom was a new one to the Spaniards and one for which a descriptive terminology had not yet become current. Thus the oldest accounts frequently employ such terms as "swallow" and "drink" in attempting to describe the new and unaccustomed practise.

According to Clavigero, "After dining, the lords used to compose themselves to sleep with the smoke of tobacco. This plant was greatly in use among the Mexicans. They made various plasters with it, and took it not only in smoke at the mouth, but also in snuff at the nose. In order to smoke it, they put the leaves, with the gum of liquidambar and other hot, warm, and odoriferous herbs, into a little pipe of wood or reed or some other more valuable substance. They received the smoke by sucking the pipe and shutting

the nostrils with the fingers, so that it might pass by the breath more easily toward the lungs."

While, apparently, tobacco was smoked largely in ancient Mexico merely for the pleasurable sensation, it evidently also was believed to possess much the same supernatural, curative, and religious functions and properties which it enjoyed to a greater extent among the Indians of the United States. It is difficult to distinguish accurately, in the equivocal language of the old historians, between the use of tobacco for recreational smoking, and as devotional incense, or between tobacco and other aromatic products, such as copal. The words "fumigating," "incensing" and "perfuming" are frequently used in old records, and it is sometimes difficult to determine whether these words were used in their modern sense or in an endeavor to find descriptive terms for what was, to the writer, a new and peculiar custom. However, among some modern Indian tribes of Mexico, tobacco is smoked on many occasions of religious ceremony, smoke being blown to the four cardinal points, and on the affected parts of persons undergoing curative treatment by the shaman-priest. The white clouds of tobacco smoke especially are believed to have an intimate connection with the rain clouds, and play an important part in many ceremonies for the securing of rain.

While Mexico is preëminently a region of the cigarette and the tubular pipe, and the modern pipe with its bowl of "elbow" shape is not mentioned by the early chroniclers, yet specimens of this latter type in very interesting and artistic shapes are far from uncommon in archaeological collections from the Valley of Mexico. This is the more unusual in that the elbow pipe is not known in northern Mexico or the adjacent parts of the United States. However, the general type and nature of the pottery of which these pipes were made,

is more characteristic of the Toltecs, the predecessors of the Aztecs in the Valley of Mexico, than of the latter, which fact may explain their apparent absence at the time of the Conquest. A number of these pipes are shown in the accompanying plates.

The Mexican pottery pipe of pre-Columbian days differs only in detail from the modern "clay" pipe. The stem is straight with a smoke passage of small caliber; the bowl is of ample or large capacity and set at the end of the stem, generally at an obtuse angle. This inclination of the bowl is one of the characteristic features of Mexican pipes, as well as the flattened base of the stem which enables the pipe to be set down with the bowl upright. Apparently they were smoked without wooden stems, though, if these had ever been used, they would have disappeared with the lapse of time. They are always well, artistically and delicately shaped with polished surfaces of red, chocolate or buff color, decorated with incised lines, but never painted except in solid colors. The bowls are frequently modeled in grotesque forms.

The most frequent type of Mexican pipe is one decorated with incised lines to resemble conventionalized animal heads with large eyes and long beaks, probably representing birds. There are two forms of these, one of a chocolate color, the beak very flat and the concentric eyes with a central dot, probably representing some species of duck. The second form is always of red or buff pottery and shows a high hooked beak ending in a scroll. The eyes are also of concentric circles. Presumably another species of bird was intended. In both forms the art is very conventionalized, the head forming the bowl, and the beak, artificially prolonged, the stem.

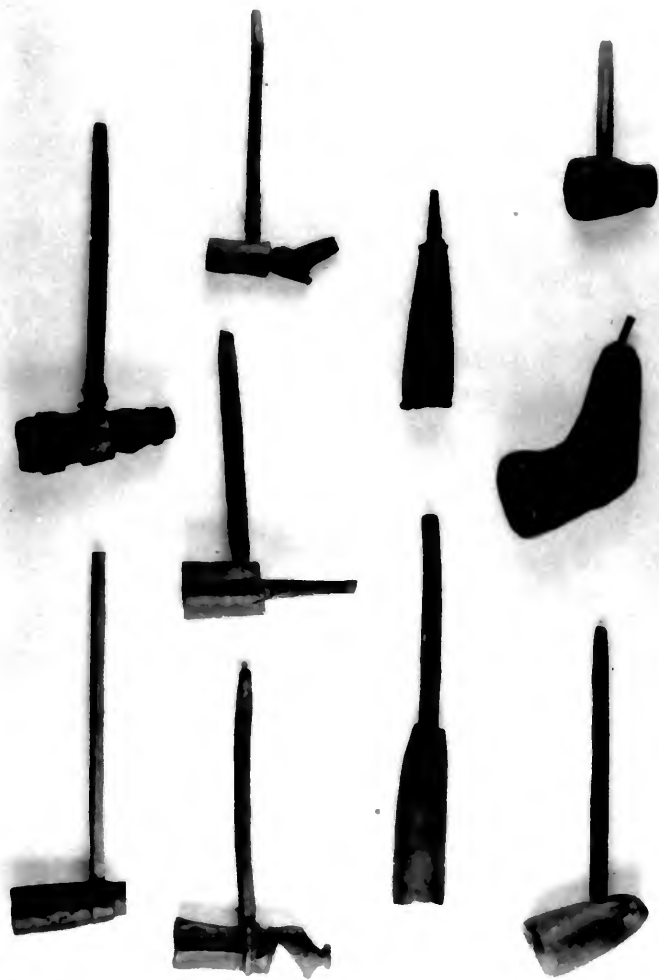
In other Mexican pipes the bowls are modeled in the form of grotesque human or animal heads, flowers,

or, in one specimen, a human foot. Other pipes are plain without any attempt at artistic effect.

The "elbow" pipes of Mexico are, as we have seen, not typical of this region and possibly an independent local development. This type is, however, the characteristic form of smoking implement in use in eastern and south-central South America, in eastern and southern Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and northern Argentina. Pottery pipes of pre-Columbian times are frequently found in these regions, though probably then, as at present, the usual type was made of wood. The best of these pottery pipes come from the Calchaqui region of northwest Argentina. They somewhat resemble the modern "clay" pipe, but are roughly made of coarse pottery with tubular stems of a large caliber. The bowls are generally large and conical with two short legs on which the pipe can be rested upright, and frequently rude relief ornament has been applied to the bowls so that, in combination with the short supports, a grotesque animal form is suggested. Better pipes of polished black pottery with incised decorations are occasionally found.

The pipes of the modern peoples are well illustrated by those of the Indians of the Gran Chaco of Paraguay. The stems are small, short, thin, and made of hollow cactus wood. While a few groups make bowls of rude, massive pottery, the usual bowl is made of hard wood in a high cylindrical or slightly conical shape. Many of these are crude, but some are well shaped and finished; some are large, but the majority rather small. Most are plain, but a few are rudely carved. Generally the base of the bowl projects below the stem orifice to some distance, and the pipe bears a superficial resemblance to a modern corn-cob pipe, which may have been its prototype.

The Gran Chaco practically marks the southernmost limit of tobacco raising. Among the Tehuelche



TOBACCO PIPES FROM THE UPPER PARAGUAY AND TAPAJÓZ RIVERS, PARAGUAY AND BRAZIL.

of southern Argentina, tobacco is such a luxury that it is mixed with wood shavings, and among the tribes of Tierra del Fuego, tobacco is utterly unknown.

While smoking was in pre-Columbian times as at present the favorite method of taking tobacco, yet chewing and snuffing tobacco and licking and drinking decoctions of it were also practised, sometimes in place of smoking and sometimes in conjunction with it. These habits, especially snuffing and chewing, were also adopted by European races, and in former times had a vogue and sanction at least as great as smoking, but of late years they have lost caste and social prestige and seem to be on the wane. Both of these customs were, and are, in aboriginal America, primarily associated with vegetable products other than tobacco. The tobacco-chewing area is found in western South America near the Andes, and is doubtless related to the more characteristic coca-chewing custom of the Andean highlands. The snuffing habit is wider-spread over most of the Amazonian area and the West Indies. However, the snuff taken throughout this area is more frequently made from other plants than tobacco.

In the western part of the Amazonian forests, near the foot of the Andes, smoking is unknown, but tobacco is licked or, at times, chewed instead. This is, doubtless, due to the influence of the coca-chewing habit of the Andean highlands, many of these tobacco-licking tribes also chewing the coca leaf. Among these tribes a decoction is generally made by boiling down the tobacco leaves with water until a strong, thick residue of a tarry consistency and color is produced. Small quantities of this concentrated solution are placed on the tongue from time to time, and the desired narcotic effect thus secured.

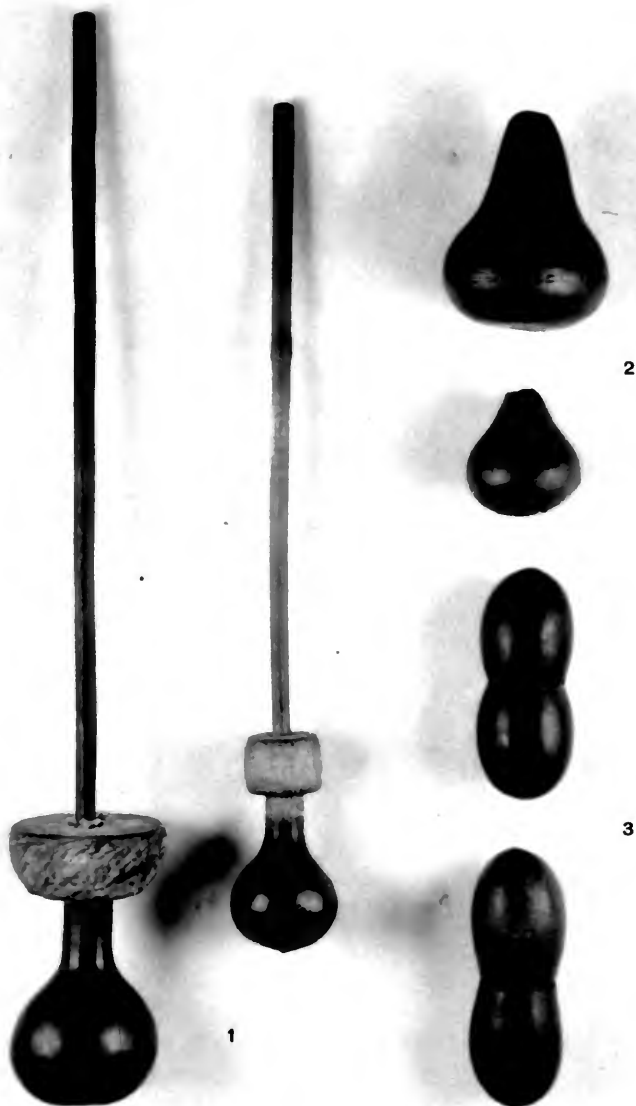
The Arhuaco Indians of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in northern Colombia, for instance, carry with them constantly a tiny hollow gourd containing

a little of this thick dark decoction. When two men meet on the trail or a visit is made, the gourds are exchanged, and each man dips his finger into the other's gourd and touches the tobacco to his lips, or, more frequently, merely goes through the motions of so doing.

The use of coca (*Erythroxylum coca*) usurps that of tobacco in the Andean highlands and adjacent regions. The coca leaves contain the narcotic principle from which the cocaine of modern pharmacy is extracted, and the native habit of chewing the toasted leaves doubtless induces a physiological effect similar to, if less pronounced than, the modern use of cocaine—a lessening of the pangs of hunger and fatigue.

The coca plant is grown by the natives in small plantations and the green leaves gathered, toasted, and carried by the men in small knitted bags. Coca is always taken in combination with lime, and in this a striking analogy is shown with the custom of chewing betel-nut in the East Indies. The lime is generally secured by burning shells, and is carried in a powdered form in pear-shaped gourds. A man takes a handful of toasted coca leaves from his bag and puts it into his mouth, introduces a stick into the lime gourd until it is covered with lime powder, and licks this off, then chewing the coca leaves and lime together. The rattling of the stick in the lime gourd is one of the constant sounds in every Indian village. These little gourds containing lime have been found in pre-Columbian graves of indefinite age in Peru and other Andean regions, thus demonstrating the aboriginality of the custom.

The use of snuff is common among many tribes of central and northern South America, particularly in the lowland regions of Colombia and Venezuela, and was probably also in vogue in the West Indies at the time of Columbus. The tribes of this region make



1, LIME GOURDS, ARHUACO INDIANS, COLUMBIA. 2, TOBACCO GOURDS, ARHUACO INDIANS, COLUMBIA. 3, LIME GOURDS, CHUNCHO INDIANS, PERU.

a snuff in which pulverized seeds of an *Acacia* or *Mimosa*, *manioc* flour, and pulverized lime from a mollusk shell form the basic ingredients, though tobacco is apparently used in some localities. The mixture is blown or snuffed up the nostrils and produces a mild intoxication, presumably giving increased strength and courage. This snuff is most commonly known as *niopo* or *iopo*.

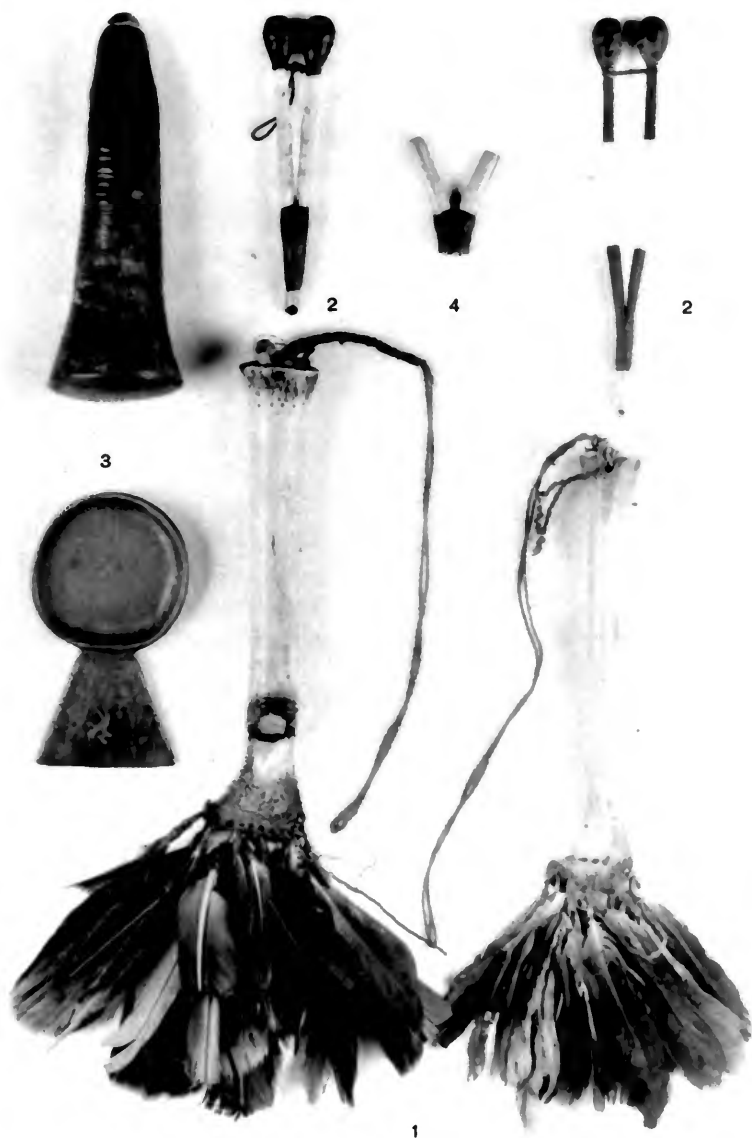
The ingredients are generally pulverized with a mortar and pestle. In Venezuela, where the custom seems to have reached its greatest development, the snuff is kept in a hollow jaguar bone which is permanently closed at the lower end with pitch or gum into which some object, such as a piece of glass, crystal, or shell is fixed as a decoration, and the other end kept closed by means of a stopper, generally of cloth. The snuff-holder is generally further decorated with toucan feathers and incised designs. The snuff is taken by means of a special and ornate apparatus of a Y-shape made of two hollow bird bones branching at the top, but meeting at the bottom, and wound with pitched cord. At the top, two hollow balls of wood or seeds are attached to the ends of the bones. The two balls are placed against the nostrils, and the lower end of the bifurcated tube placed in the snuff-holder. A vigorous sniff then brings some of the powder up into the nose. In Colombia, a less developed snuff-taker is employed. Two hollow bird-bones are fastened by means of pitch into a V-shape, the lower apex being closed by means of pitch into which, again, a decorative element is fixed, the two bones, however, being connected. A pinch of snuff, which is kept in a gourd, is introduced into the bone, one end of which is placed in a nostril, the other in the mouth. A puff of the breath sends the powder up into the nose.

A similar custom apparently was in use in the West Indies in the time of Columbus, if we may judge

from the account of Oviedo, one of the earliest historians. This account, however, has given rise to much argument, inasmuch as he apparently confused the two customs of smoking and snuff-taking. In his history, an illustration is given of a forked tube very similar to those used in Venezuela for the taking of snuff, but the statement is made that it was this instrument which was called *tabaco*, not the herb.

Tobacco in the form of snuff was also used both by the Incas of Peru and the Aztecs of Mexico at the time of the Conquest.

The first European contact with tobacco was, as we have seen, in the West Indies, where the cigar was the favorite method of use. For a decade or two these islands formed the principal field for European, that is to say, Spanish, discovery and exploitation, and it is from them that most of the names and many of the customs relative to tobacco at present have been borrowed. Apparently, the early Spanish conquerors, especially those of the lower grades and the negro slaves, soon adopted the custom, and among many it became a habit. At first the practise was frowned upon by the leaders and clergy as a vice. Bishop Las Casas, the beloved "Protector of the Indians," wrote at that time, "I knew Spaniards on this island of Española who were accustomed to take it, and being reprimanded for it, by telling them it was a vice, they replied they were unable to cease using it. I do not know what pleasure or benefit they found in it." The same bewilderment seems to puzzle the minds of non-smoking reformers to-day. Benzoni, who visited America about 1541, said, "See what a pestiferous and wicked poison from the devil this must be! It has happened several times to me that going through the provinces of Guatemala and Nicaragua I have entered the house of an Indian who had taken this herb, which

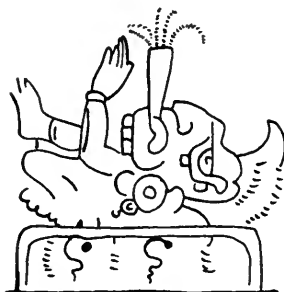


1, SNUFF HOLDERS, VENEZUELA. 2, TUBES FOR INHALING SNUFF, VENEZUELA.
3, MORTAR AND PESTLE FOR GRINDING SNUFF, GUAHIBO INDIANS, COLUMBIA.
4, SNUFF-TAKER, TUYUKA INDIANS, COLUMBIA.

in the Mexican language is called tobacco, and, immediately perceiving this sharp, fetid smell, I was obliged to go away in haste and seek some other place."

Tobacco, on the other hand, by its devotees and proponents, was regarded as a medicinal plant of wonderful power, a panacea and cure-all, endowed with magical properties. Benzoni again says, "These leaves were strung together, hung in the shade and dried, and used whole or powdered, and were considered good for headaches, lockjaw, toothache, coughs, asthma, stomach-ache, obstructions, kidney troubles, diseases of the heart, rheumatism, the poisoning from arrows, carbuncles, polypus, consumption." Monardes, who wrote a treatise on medicinal plants in 1574, enumerates the following methods of using tobacco as a medicine: heating the leaves and applying them to the parts affected; rubbing the teeth with a rag dipped in the juice; wrapping a leaf into a pill and inserting it in the tooth; boiling the leaves; making decoctions of its leaves; making a syrup of it; smoking it by the mouth; reducing the leaves to ashes; pounding the green leaves and mixing them with oil or steeping them in vinegar; using the powder as a poultice if leaves are not to be had; making fomentations; smoking through the nose; rubbing the leaves on the afflicted parts; inserting the juice into the wound; applying bruised leaves to the wound.

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MEXICAN SMOKING.
FROM THE MANUSCRIPT TROANO.



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